BOOKS OF INTEREST SEEN IN REVIEW AND COMMENT

THE BOOK OF THE WEEK.

A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLAND. By Gilbert K. Chesterton. (John Lane Company. $1.50.)

The announcement that Mr. Chesterton has written a History of England may at first glance appear to many of us rather like an announcement that Mr. Charles Chaplin was appearing as *Macbeth* or that Mr. Bernard Shaw had produced a treatise on astronomy. It would suggest the idea of a humorist dealing with a serious matter somewhat out of his line. But this idea would be, as applied to the case in hand, entirely wrong; for it would rest upon two mistaken impressions, a mistaken impression of the man and a mistaken impression of the nature of the attempted work.

There is an ancient saw about true words spoken in jest. But the greater jesters have often a curious faculty of truth or even of wisdom underlying their laughter; a faculty which, as the man grows older and mellower, comes to the fore and dominates the man. So his cleverness, which first attracted and qualified popular interest in him, shows truly as a mere manner of saying great things with a smile, a twinkle in the eye that sees deep into humanity. Aristophanes was like that, and Cervantes and Moliere and Mark Twain. A list of the world's great humorists would read in retrospect as a list of greatly human philosophers. Such men laugh joyously in youth and wisely smile in age. The motley becomes an ornament of wisdom; the humorist becomes something strangely like a prophet. That is the difference between the fool and the jester. For the fool is a fool until the end, but the jester from the beginning has been nobody's fool; many times he has been wiser than the king.

And in their earlier days you shall know the two apart by this: the fool cavorts to win applause, but the jester dances for joy. The fool strives to amuse others, but the jester laughs because he is himself amused. The one is showing himself off; the other is showing up human nature. Mr. Chesterton has always been amusing. And more and more of us are coming to realise that it is because he knows enough about the world to find amusement in it.

As for History, most of us very naturally regard it as a matter to be studied wearily at school: a dry, indigestible mass of names and dates and battles fought by creatures who had no railroads and no telephones and were therefore (so far as we can really believe in them at all) rather less human than any well drawn character in fiction. That is no fault of ours but of the way in which we were taught and of the way in which most history books are written. They were written by learned and academic intellectuals as a study of dead facts. They should have been written like fiction; that is, by creative artists, as a representation of living humanity. Otherwise history simply becomes untrue. For the truth is of course that those ancient wars were fought as this present war is being fought, by men like you and me; that those old heroisms were inspired by such women as to-day are our own mothers and sisters and wives. So long as you imagine Joan of Arc a mere saint and maiden warrior you have not known any history, for such a figure is about as real to the imagination as a Centaur or a Hippogriff. You begin to learn history when you begin to think of her as at once the Maid of Orleans and a little girl of eighteen, who might have been your sweetheart or your stenographer; you begin to learn history when you remember not merely that George Washington was the father of his country but what sort of a fellow he must have been to do business with. So long as we live, the doings of our world remain to every man in the street a part of His Story: they only become History when we are dead.

Now all this seems perhaps going very far afield from the discussion of a particular book. But it is precisely necessary in order to point out with any clearness what manner of book this is with which we have to deal. It is called a History of England; but it is not like any history we have studied in the schoolroom, because it is concerned not with facts but with the human causes and effects of those facts. It is a history of Ideas: how people thought this or that, and how their thoughts moved them to deeds. It deals not in dates but in generations; not in battles but in the reasons why people fought and the upshot of their fighting; not in the things which happened so much as in what those happenings mean. That is the first point about it. And the second is that it is as imaginative as a moving picture and as brilliantly clever as a clever play. Yet this does not mean that it is written like a historical novel, or indeed like a story at all. Most of it is hardly narrative. It is in form rather more like a personal essay. The facts come in as allusion or proof or illustration, and the reader's rudimentary knowledge of them is practically taken for granted. To any one lacking the ordinary school pattern of historical events the book would be possibly irritating and certainly obscure. But for those who know already the dry facts in a general way it may well be the beginning of that imaginative understanding of the past which alone is humanly worth while. It is in nowise a lazy book, for it demands and arouses thought—a quality which may come somewhat as a shock to those who have never thought of thinking about history at all. It is in effect a humorous and educated man talking over the long retrospect of the English nation with a reader in whom the same education is assumed; a feast of reason calling for good digestion to wait on appetite; well spiced also with wit and leavened by no inconsiderable wisdom.

Gilbert K. Chesterton, author of "A Short History of England." John Lane Co.

George Barton, Author of "The World's Greatest Military Spies and Secret Service Agents." Page Co.

Egerton Castle, Author of "Wolflure." Appleton.

REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

WOLF-LURE. By Agnes and Egerton Castle. (D. Appleton and Company.) $1.50.

It may be the habit of reviewers and libraries to classify the Castles' novels as historic fiction. But this does not alter the fact that the concrete facts of history form the aspect of these books that is least important both during the reading and in the memory they leave behind them. They may owe their distinctive mood and atmosphere to a particular date, just as a good wine owes its bouquet to a certain vintage, but we think of the atmosphere and the bouquet not as cold historic facts but as mellow sources of present enjoyment.

This is even more than usually true of *Wolf-Lure*. We learn almost from the opening page that the setting is the mountainous woods of Gascony, near the sea coast, and the epoch the autumn months of 1815. But what we remember is a series of woodland pictures seen through a golden haze, shading off mysteriously into the shadows of "the brown hour"—for it is at this mystic hour of the gloaming that the supposed narrator of this chronicle meets the vivid and compelling young woman, aristocrat in manner and peasant in garb, who scoffs at the dangers implied in the local saying of equivocal meaning, "Rencontrer un loup a la brune"—"To meet a wolf in the dusk."

It is certainly an exceptional experience for a prosaic Anglo-Saxon, somewhat of an invalid and with a special bent for archæology, to be mistaken by a French count as his long lost son and heir, and in consequence eagerly received with unexpected and bewildering hospitality. The facts lying beneath this initial mystery, and which the authors disclose at their leisure, are that the hero's host, the Comte de Ruffeleu, now almost in his dotage, has suffered a lifelong agony of mind through the malice of his former wife, whose hatred led her to steal their infant son and bring him up secretly in some hiding place, supposedly in England. Our British friend, as chance would have it, bears the curiously un-English name of De Quercy, the ancient title of this special section of Gascony. Furthermore, he chances to bear a general likeness to the pictures in the Ruffeleu portrait gallery. So it is not strange that not only the old count should have fallen under a delusion but that it should also have been shared by his niece, the vivid and fearless young Amazon of the "brown hour."

Our Englishman is fated, as we soon perceive, to be little more than a spectator of the tempestuous and tragic romance of which La Louvecelle, the count's niece, is the storm centre. What part this girl, whose very nickname implies a lurking wolfishness, has played in royalist plots and how much blood has been shed by her hand are some of the questions tantalizingly hinted at in pages that take us through forests swarming not only with four footed perils like wolves and wild bears but with the greater and more secret menace of outlaw bands lurking in the uncharted caverns of the sea eaten coast. The setting forms a fitting background for adventure wild enough to engender a pleasant breathlessness while artistically stopping short of the point that strains credulity. And through it all is the dominating presence of the Loup-Cervier ("the Lynx"), fit running mate of La Louvecelle, true son of Gascony in his bombast, his courage, his compelling lovableness. Just what is the Loup-Cervier's relation to the Ruffeleu family tree and what part he plays in the destiny of La Louvecelle are matters which the authors have chosen to bide their time in telling, an example which a discreet reviewer does well to emulate. But 'tis a good vintage and of full flavor.

MICHAEL, BROTHER OF JERRY. By Jack London. (The Macmillan Co.) $1.50.

Once again Jack London has written a dog story, this time the adventures of an Irish terrier puppy from a South Sea Island to the vaudeville stages of the United States. Mr. London's pen is inspired when he describes a puppy; from the first eager tilt of his ears and the first good natured waving of his tale Michael is a person.

The story opens on the moon bathed beach at Tulagi, when Michael, the wriggling, tail wagging puppy, is stolen by a boat steward to sell at the next port. It was not the first time that Dag Daughtry had stolen a dog, with good profit, and he little suspected the things he would give up for the appreciative Michael.

The first half of the book is one adventure after another, both for Michael and Daughtry. When the captain realizes that his steward will not sell the puppy, with only human philosophy he decides virtuously that the dog must be returned to his lawful owners. But Daughtry, experienced dog stealer, who has made friends with Michael as a good investment, abandons his twenty pounds salary to escape unnoticed with the ecstatic Michael and the leprous black slave Kwaque.

Then follow weeks of romance on the treasure hunting ship with the charming impostor, the Ancient Mariner. When finally the wreck which rightfully belongs to all sea stories comes Daughtry finds under his protection in the third lifeboat the Ancient Mariner, Big John, the child-like Swede; Ah Moy, the hundred year old Chinese cook; Michael and Scrappy, the Newfoundland pup, the ship's cat, Cocky, the confiding white cockatoo, and Kwaque.

Mr. London writes with all the feeling and tragedy of his real genius when, in San Francisco, Michael's would-be possessors send the leper Kwaque and Daughtry, who has contracted the horrible disease, to the pest house.

Then comes the tragedy of Michael's life. He passes from the hands of one trainer to another; he is kicked, beaten, tortured until there is little resistance in his pathetic, maimed little body. And even at the end, when he is rebought by his family, the family from which he was stolen on the moonlit beach of Tulagi, it seems little enough happiness for the puppy who had braved a South Sea wreck with his god, Daughtry.

MY HOME IN THE FIELD OF MERCY. Frances Wilson Huard. (George H. Doran Co.) $1.35.

Mrs. Huard has just published her second war book. Her first, "My Home in the Field of Honor," told of leaving her chateau with other village refugees before the advancing Germans, to return, when the enemy had been driven back, to a plundered, demolished home. Everything that they could think of the boches had done, even to pouring two dozen jars of jam over her piano strings.

"War may pass and peace may come again, but I can never pardon," she wrote simply, after she had visited a family of crushed, grief stricken peasant women.

"My Home in the Field of Mercy" tells of turning her home into a hospital, of confidently and fearlessly accepting her first real patients—120 men sick with typhoid. She had forty-five beds, the Germans had left one bathtub intact. Her first night of watch over the sick men is terrifying. For Mrs. Huard is not a nurse, and as she sat there, with one helping soldier in a room of screaming, delirious, moaning men, she was suddenly frightened and homesick. There was one tall, white robed man who walked in his sleep; each time he appeared, silent and tall, at her side she was frozen with terror. But that night passed and soon it became all in the day's work.

"I rapidly developed a strong pair of biceps," she wrote, with her faint, grim humor, while she described how the two women and the two orderlies three times each day bathed every patient.

There is none of the glamour of war about her book. It is all quiet, a heavy, suffocating quiet. She has told her story simply and with the deep, unexcitable sorrow that only a man or woman who has been there feels. It is very human, with constant flashes of humor, and through all a deep and sympathetic understanding.

BOOKS AND BOOKMEN

The Century Company has received the announcement that Miss Phyllis Bottome, author of "The Second Fiddle" and "The Dark Tower," is to be married in Paris shortly after Christmas to an old friend who has been since the beginning of the war fighting in the British army. Miss Bottome in her letter ordered a number of books; "and whatever else you leave out," she said, "don't fail to send the 'Century Cook Book'."

Major Eric Fisher Wood, author of "The Note Book of an Intelligence Officer," is at present stationed at Chillicothe, Ohio, as assistant chief of staff to Major-Gen. Glenn.

Houghton Mifflin Company announce a second impression of Capt. Louis Keene's "Crumps," the plain tale of a Canadian who went, and of "Our Square and the People in It," by Samuel Hopkins Adams.

Doubleday, Page & Co. announce the opening of their third book shop, located in the Liberty Tower Building (New York) at 55 Liberty street. The new shop is in charge of men who "know books," and every means is offered to the men of the downtown business district to facilitate book buying. A feature of the shop is a special showing of war books.

The long awaited "Life and Letters of Edward Everett Hale," preacher, author, patriot and guide, philosopher and friend to untold thousands, will be published by Little, Brown & Co. about November 30. In these two volumes Dr. Hale reveals himself in the selections from his many letters, journals and notebooks, which his son Edward E., Jr., professor in English at Union College, Schenectady, N. Y., has carefully edited. This is a two volume biography comprising 200,000 words, making a total of 800 pages, and illustrated with a photogravure frontispiece and eight half-tone pictures in each volume and published at $5 net.

During November the J. B. Lippincott Company publish a book of interest to students of the war, "The War and the Bagdad Railway," by the noted authority upon Asiatic history and problems, Prof. Morris Jastrow, Jr., Ph. D., Ll. D., of the University of Pennsylvania. "The Training and Rewards of a Physician," by Dr. Richard C. Cabot, author of "What Men Live By," will be one of the volumes in the Lippincott Training Series. "Tales of Washington Irving's Alhambra," by Leila H. Cheney, brings these tales within the mental reach of young readers. "Soil Physics and Management," by J. G. Mosier, and "Kiln Drying of Lumber," by H. D. Tiemann, are additions to scientific preparedness.

Granville Barker's forthcoming book, "Three Short Plays," includes a farce, a comedy and a dramatic talk, and these are the only published plays of this famous English dramatist and producer since the appearance of "The Madras House."

"The Evergreen Tree," the new Community Masque by Percy Mackaye which D. Appleton and Company are publishing, is being rushed through the press so that it will be in the hands of the bookseller by Thanksgiving week.

The Century Co. announce that they are now the exclusive American publishers of the work of Louis Raemaekers, the famous Dutch cartoonist, in book form. "Kultur in Cartoons," a second series of Raemaekers's work, with explanatory matter by G. K. Chesterton, Eden Phillpotts and others is announced by them for publication in November.

Witter Bynner, whose volume "Grenstone Poems" was recently published by Stokes, is at present very busy with the rehearsals of his new play which under the management of Henry W. Savage will tour the United States in the near future.

"Grenstone Poems" have as their central figure the "Celia" of his former volume, "The New World." Though they are mostly short poems, they have been written in sequence to form a narrative of love, separation and victory over death.

Although "The Plattsburgers," by Arthur Stanwood Pier, has been published only a few weeks Houghton-Mifflin Company announce that a second impression has already been necessitated by the demand for the book.